

October weather has been kinder than the hot dryness of September. One improvement is that the afternoons have dropped down to the mid-90s. Also, the winds have picked up enough to spread thinner layers of the dust hanging over the roads and corrals.

Last week, we had our first fall rain, 1/10th on an inch in all the gauges. Close to the east boundaries of the county, a farmer caught enough hail and rain to record one inch and ruin half a bale per acre of dryland cotton. I don't think the hailstones hurt any livestock as that particular farmer took down his fences years ago to be sure he didn't develop any stock farming ideas.

In about 90 percent of the cases, hombres who sow seed in the Shortgrass Country are thought to have more ambition than judgment. The low rainfall and the high incidence of weather failure during the growing seasons makes our land about as suitable for farming as the beauty queen Miss Universe is to be cast as the housewife in a dish soap or laundry ad.

Farmers who do succeed out here are respected everywhere as being tops on their trade. Like the old boy that I was telling you about, I'd bet eight to five that he could grow asparagus in places where desert hens have to use an incubator to hatch their chicks.

For 16 years I leased a ranch five miles from his farm. For 10 of those 16 years, I'd still be feeding when he made his first cutting of hay. It seemed ridiculous that feed trucks coming to the ranch were meeting his trucks going to the elevators. Along in late summer I'd drive by, freighting a load or so of knot to peewee size lambs for my harvest. I never did dare check, but I suspect that he lost more grain to the weevils and mice than those lambs netted.

The real bad thing was the way nosy people like my wife and my banker kept asking why didn't I break some land into a farm.

At first I tried to explain that way back in Germany in my great grandfather's time a mean old witch hexed away the family's ability to plow and do all that other hard labor.

When that didn't work, I'd squinch up my eyes real tight like old John Wayne used to do when he was backing off a bandit gang, or bluffing a big bunch of Injuns from a waterhole, and say, "The first man that sticks a flange of raw iron in that soil, or runs a rubber cleated tire over that ground had better have a deed over his heart made of bullet proof steel."

I got so good at it some of the visitors would cry. I remember a deer hunter that I pulled that on that had to get out his handkerchief to dry up the tears. It was a touching sight. He had to unbuckle his knife and pistol belt and undo his bandolier of ammunition. I don't believe I ever saw a hunter cry that hard, unless it was one that was slightly overdosed from too much beer, and was overcome by homesickness.

Truth was, and the truth is, that farms and farming interfere too much with important pastimes. Even in these days of tape decks and airconditioned cabs, tractors don't regularly pass by the racetracks or the domino halls. You don't overhaul a combine in a hotel lobby, and the prettiest haybaler to leave the factory will never have the appeal of a young colt.

Winds kick up dust in new places every day. The count is on for the first feed runs. Those of weak heart had better start moving to the side because when winter hits, she's going to be a rough one.